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ABSTRACT

The debate over the condition of American public education has spanned the last decade. Some argue that public education is "bad" and needs a complete overhaul, and others assert that public education is "good" but needs to be improved. This paper presents findings of a study that examined the impact of the outcomes-based education (OBE) movement on public education. The first part provides background information on the OBE movement and argues that the movement is based on the notion that all public schools are bad and that public education can only be saved through radical reform. The paper asserts that OBE will not survive because it is based on a false premise that attempts to discredit public schools. A survey of teachers in urban, suburban, and rural schools in northeastern Pennsylvania elicited 233 usable returns. Teachers' ratings of the effectiveness of OBE-related instructional techniques indicated that OBE, except for cooperative learning, has had little impact on their instructional techniques. Ninety percent said that parent involvement was either "very important" or "important." Alternative-assessment techniques were "seldom" or "never" used by a range of 58 to 90 percent of respondents: conclusions are that the OBE emphasis on parent involvement will have a lasting influence on the education culture; teacher-constructed tests were used by more teachers than any other assessment tool; and teachers considered teacher-constructed tests to be more valid and practical than other assessment tools. Five tables are included. (LMI)

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Outcomes Based Education--Implications and Innovations

ROBERT CLARKE

ED 387 907

The debate over the condition of American public school education has been raging for over 10 years. At the risk of being accused of oversimplifying, there are two armed camps. One camp says that public education is "bad" and needs a complete overhaul, while the other camp claims that public education is "good" but needs to be improved, as does any organization.

While the campers defend their positions and attack their opponents, the public school system continues its day to day operation, working toward the goal of educating children. The public school teachers and administrators in the trenches do not seem to be fully aware of the intensity of the battles or the extent to which they are being directly or indirectly aspersed.

The perspective taken here is admittedly limited in scope, perhaps too limited to provide anything but a narrow review and critical commentary on existing "fact." Our viewpoints are derived from an analysis of existing information and our own personal experiences in observing student teachers and teachers in public schools.

Teachers' jobs are different from what they were 20 or even 10 years ago. Teaches are asked to accomplish more in less time. The amount of content that teachers have to teach is much more extensive than in the "good old days." As an example, a common practice in social studies 20 years ago was to require students to memorize the names of the Presidents and their dates of service. Since Eisenhower there have been eight Presidents elected, hence eight additional names and dates to memorize. The

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impact is even more impressive when we think of the complexity of world events that have occurred during the terms of office of Presidents Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, Ford, Carter, Reagan, Bush, and Clinton.

The amount of content to be taught has increased just as rapidly in other disciplines, and teachers are expected to keep abreast of the knowledge explosion and to teach relevant and important information to their students. So, what has happened is that there is more to be taught and less time to teach, because of shortened work days and more "subjects."

When we add to the knowledge explosion other problems such as the diminishing influence of the family and organized religions, we have to conclude that the teacher's job is more demanding and more stressful. Now, one of the most recent brilliant mandates--inclusion--has many teachers scratching their heads and asking: "What next?"

Standardized test results are being analyzed carefully by the community and by state and federal officials. Teachers are being held responsible for the performance of their students, and they are being openly criticized when results fall short of expectations. Teachers need to say more forcefully that the students are not the same. The breakdown of the family and declining role of organized religions seem to have resulted in producing students who are less attentive and more likely to misbehave. And, as many teachers know, the true nightmare for some teachers has been inclusion.

The purpose of the study was to determine the impact of the OBE movement on public education. Supporters of OBE seem to see it as a panacea. Detractors see it as a trend that will not last. We take the latter position, but we believe that there may be

some curricular or instructional benefits that will accrue to education from the OBE experiment.

At this stage of the OBE experiment, it may not be practical to try to determine what, if any, enduring benefits OBE has brought. Instead, we investigated, in a limited geographic area, the impact of three aspects of OBE: instructional innovations, parent involvement, and alternative assessments.

Before discussing our findings, it seems appropriate to provide some background on the OBE movement. Some readers will consider our discussion biased, and we are prepared to listen. Our opinion is that our schools, in general, are good. Some are very good, and some are very bad. To a logical person the solution seems simple: maintain the good ones and improve the bad ones. The OBE movement, however, seems predicated on the notion that all schools are bad and public education, and possibly our nation, can only be saved by radical reform, namely OBE.

The OBE movement seems to have its roots in the negative opinions expressed by some writers during the Reagan and Bush years. Possibly the most severe attack came in 1983 with the publication of A Nation at Risk, wherein the American people were warned of a "rising tide of mediocrity."[1] For some reason, Department of Education officials in Washington interpreted testing data as indicating that our schools were ineffective. The harassment of the schools continues to this day, even though a number of educational researchers such as Gerald Bracey, Harold Hodgkinson, Elliot Eisner, and Dale Whittington have indicated and validated a contrary opinion.

Gerald Bracey was probably the first researcher to challenge the notion that our schools are bad. In his annual "Bracey Report on the Condition of Public Education" in Phi Delta Kappan, he has been exposing how data related to public schools have been misinterpreted resulting in a poor picture of the schools.[2] Harold Hodgkinson concluded that educators alone cannot fix education. The fix must also involve health-care, housing, transportation, job-training, and social welfare bureaucracies.[3] Elliot Eisner found that there were many important education questions that the federally-inspired reform efforts have not even identified.[4] Dale Whittington concluded that "one could argue that students know more American history today than did their age peers of the past."[5]

Perhaps the most reprehensible attempt to discredit public schools involves the Sandia report. In February, 1990, Admiral James Watkins, the Secretary of Energy, announced that he had designated the Sandia National Laboratories as the agency to conduct a study of the effectiveness of public schools.[6]

The three senior researchers assigned to the project were Charles Carson, Robert Huelskamp, and Thomas Woodall. The three investigated popular measures used to "assess" education. Wherever possible, they analyzed data gathered over time. The researchers summarized their findings thusly: "To our surprise, on nearly every measure, we found already steady or slightly improving trends."[7]

The Sandia researchers worked without any a prior premises to prove or disprove. The Sandia report was withheld from publication when bureaucrats at The U.S. Department of Education discovered that the findings did not support the President's national agenda for school reform--America 2000.[8] If this suppression of evidence had

been related to any other issue of vital national concern, young Robert Woodwards would have been appearing like phone booths, and the media would be bloodthirsty. It appears that bashing schools and teachers has become an acceptable activity, even when the bashing is undeserved.

Actually, during the last 10 years it was probably an act of courage for an educational researcher to report results honestly or to speak favorably of our schools. Gerald Bracey reported that, after publishing an article favorable to the schools, several Washington, D.C. firms told him that they could not hire him because he was "politically incorrect."[9]

The present researchers believe that OBE will not survive because it was founded on fake premises. Those premises being that the schools were bad and that only radical reform can save them. However, the movement has attracted a good deal of money and experimentation, and it is possible that some aspects of OBE will survive as part of the "education culture."

The original sample for the study included usable returns from 233 teachers in urban, suburban, and rural schools in Northeastern Pennsylvania. Data are reported in percentages. Subsequent analysis of the data will utilize statistical measures. In some cases not all 233 returns were usable for analyzing a question because, for example, some teachers could not rate the validity of an assessment tool if they had never used it.

The study investigated three aspects of the OBE movement. The first aspect of the study was to investigate how effective five OBE-related instructional techniques were.

The instructional techniques and their "effectiveness" rating in parenthesis are: peer coaching (47%), cooperative learning (58%), whole language (24%), mastery learning (24%), and OBE (42%). Based on these results, it appears that, except for cooperative learning, OBE has had little impact on instructional techniques. OBE, when used as an instructional technique, refers to teaching toward outcomes rather than objectives.

The second aspect of the study was to determine how important teachers consider parent involvement to be in the success of the school program. In this regard the OBE movement "appears" to be successful, because 90% of the respondents said that parent involvement was "important" or "very important." Also noteworthy is the fact that 58% of the respondents said parent involvement is "very important." These data are primarily valuable as a baseline measure, because we have no similar data for comparison.

The third aspect of the study dealt with the use, validity, and practicality of assessment techniques, including traditional and "alternative" tools. The techniques investigated were: standardized tests, teacher constructed tests, essays, projects, portfolios, student (peer) assessments, Venn diagrams, mind maps, right angle assessments, and parasols.

The data analysis related to the use of the assessment techniques revealed that the "alternative" or OBE-related methods (portfolios to parasols) were used "seldom" or "never" by a range of 58% to 90%. Teacher constructed tests were used by 84%. Standardized tests, when "sometimes," "frequently," and "always" are combined yielded an 85% response. Essays, when combining the same three categories, yielded a 66% response.

When analyzed for validity, only teacher constructed tests received substantial respondent support, in that 90% believe the tests are "very good" or "excellent." Support for the "alternative" methods was weak.

When the data were analyzed for practicality, teacher constructed tests had a 73% approval when the "very good" and "excellent" categories were combined. The assessment technique which was rated the second most valid was essays with an approval rating of 50%.

The data described above are depicted in Tables 1-5. The conclusions from the study are:

1. The OBE emphasis on parent involvement will have lasting influence on the "education culture."

2. Teacher constructed tests are used by more teachers than any other assessment tool.

3. Teacher constructed tests are considered more valid and more practical than other assessment tools.

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8. Tanner, op. cit.

9. Bracey, op. cit.

TABLE 1

ASSESSMENTS USED, EXPRESSED IN PERCENTAGES

Assessment	N	never 1	seldom 2	sometimes 3	frequently 4	always 5
1. Standardized Tests	233	14	3	34	9	42
2. Teacher Constructed Tests	233	0	0	17	42	42
3. Essays	233	25	8	34	25	7
4. Projects	233	8	17	42	17	17
5. Portfolios	233	33	25	25	13	4
6. Student (Peer) Assessments	233	42	42	8	2	6
7. Venn Diagrams	233	67	8	12	4	8
8. Mind Maps	233	79	4	10	4	2
9. Right Angle Assessment	233	81	7	4	4	2
10. Parasol	233	83	7	4	4	2

TABLE 2

ASSESSMENTS VALIDITY, IN PERCENTAGES

Assessment	N	never 1	seldom 2	sometimes 3	frequently 4	always 5
1. Standardized Tests	160		19	19	41	12
2. Teacher Constructed Tests	233	1	2	8	40	50
3. Essays	80	8	16	24	16	36
4. Projects	218	6	9	21	15	48
5. Portfolios	128	16	16	16	9	44
6. Student (Peer) Assessments	80	31	33	18	8	11
7. Venn Diagrams	50	61	16	16	2	5
8. Mind Maps	54	64	7	22	6	2
9. Right Angle Assessment	58	77	9	12	2	1
10. Parasol	50	78	9	9	2	2

TABLE 3

ASSESSMENTS PRACTICALITY, IN PERCENTAGES

Assessment	N	never 1	seldom 2	sometimes 3	frequently 4	always 5
1. Standardized Tests	160	8	19	34	19	19
2. Teacher Constructed Tests	233	9	9	9	26	47
3. Essays	80	19	8	24	25	25
4. Projects	218	18	11	29	9	34
5. Portfolios	128	17	8	27	18	29
6. Student (Peer) Assessments	80	48	8	26	11	8
7. Venn Diagrams	50	57	17	15	6	6
8. Mind Maps	54	67	13	11	6	2
9. Right Angle Assessment	58	71	8	6	6	8
10. Parasol	50	67	14	7	7	4

TABLE 4

PARENT INVOLVEMENT - N=178

Not Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
100%-178 2.2% (4)	7.8% (14)	32% (57)	58% (103)

TABLE 5

NEW TEACHING TECHNIQUES N = 153

	Never use it	Ineffective	Somewhat effective	Very effective
Peer Coaching	41%	12%	18%	29%
Cooperative Learning	29%	12%	29%	29%
Whole Language	53%	24%	18%	6%
Mastery Learning	53%	24%	18%	6%
OBE	47%	12%	24%	18%